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PORTUGUESE SLAVERY.

ARTICLE BY

JOHN H. HARRIS (*Organising Secretary*)

TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE

Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society.

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THE question of the slave labour conditions in Portuguese West Africa is one which has long exercised the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, and has repeatedly formed the subject of representations by it to the British Government.

The following article is based upon material gathered by the Rev. J. H. and Mrs. Harris during visits to Angola and the islands of San Thomé and Principe in 1911 and 1912. Their journey in the West African Colonies was undertaken on behalf of the Society, of which Mr. and Mrs. Harris are the Organising Secretaries. The Committee feels that as Mr. Harris is an expert of many years' experience on African subjects, who has long studied this and similar questions, his conclusions are of the highest value.

Since the advent of the Republican Government, there has seemed to be some hope that Portugal will deal with this question in a thorough way, and introduce much needed reforms; but the interests concerned are exceedingly strong, and the obstacles in the way of reform are formidable. Constant and sustained pressure will therefore undoubtedly be necessary before the deep-rooted slave systems, not only of the islands, but on the mainland of Angola, finally give place to the employment of free labour.

PORTUGUESE SLAVERY.

BY

JOHN H. HARRIS.

> "I am convinced that the unanimous determination of the British Government and the British nation to obtain from Foreign Powers a faithful and complete execution of the engagements which those Powers have entered into with Great Britain for the entire suppression of the Slave trade, will in the end be crowned with success. But for this purpose we must be firm and decided. We must not care for giving offence to the guilty parties."—*Lord Palmerston, to the Anti-Slavery Society, in* 1842.

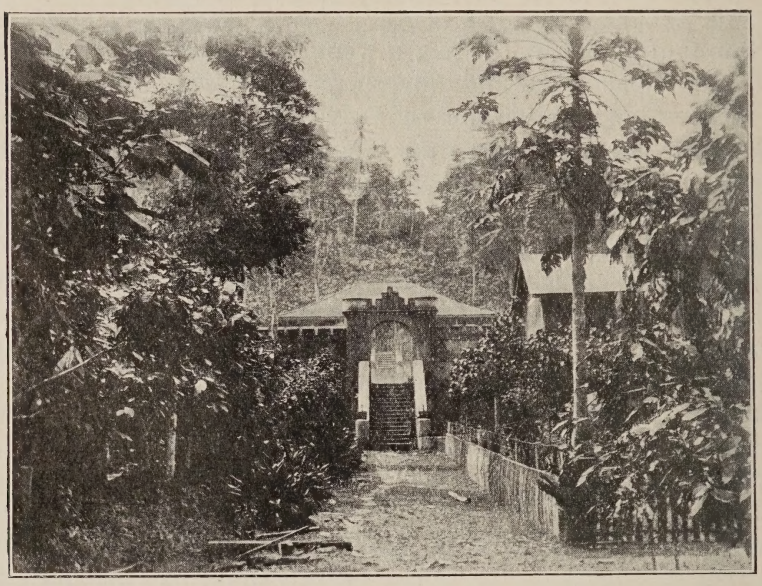
AS he told his story, the negro wept bitter tears, and then, with outstretched arms and quivering body, the appeal burst forth: "White Man, won't you rescue my wife and children?"

His years of slavery under the lash of the whip he could describe without emotion, but the thought of the wife who had shared the sorrows of captivity, and the children he loved, being given as a "matabeesh" to another, and thereby condemned to perpetual slavery, was too much for his stout heart and still sturdy frame.

Slowly the truth has emerged from the conflict of assertion and counter-assertion. For years Fox-Bourne, Nevinson, Cadbury, and Burtt, with infinite patience, struggled to expose the real conditions of labour in Portuguese West Africa, until at last every thinking man and woman accepts as an established fact the existence of plantation slavery on the cocoa farms of S. Thomé and Principe. This conviction received its most emphatic confirmation in the Cadbury-*Standard* Trial, when it was definitely shown, *inter alia*, that the slaves on the Cocoa Islands were, like the cattle and the buildings, transferable as part of the "stock and implements" of the cocoa plantations, or "roças," as they are called. In that trial, Sir Edward Carson called attention to a circular forwarded to Messrs. Cadbury, referring to the sale of an estate in S. Thomé. The stock enumerated included the item, "Two hundred black "labourers . . . £3,555," approximately £18 each.

Nations and individuals sometimes chide and denounce certain aspects of British Colonial expansion, but the world, civilised and uncivilised, regards British Courts of Justice with a feeling akin to reverential awe. Messrs. Cadbury brought the libel action against the *Standard* to protect a well-deserved reputation, the *Standard* fought the action to safeguard the liberty of the Press. Both motives were entirely honourable, and pursued at heavy costs to each party, but neither the plaintiffs nor the defendants could be quite satisfied with the verdict. In that trial, however, greater issues were at

stake than reputations and damages. The real battle was for light and truth, as between the cocoa planter and the unhappy slaves of San Thomé and Principe—and the slaves won the battle. When Mr. Justice Pickford awarded Messrs. Cadbury one farthing damages, the civilised world knew that the Portuguese planters stood convicted on the charge of maintaining slavery in West Africa. Discuss the question with German, French, or British officials, white or coloured merchants in West Africa, and the one feature upon which they rest their convictions is the trial in the Birmingham Law Courts. Messrs. Cadbury on the one side, the proprietors of the *Standard* on the other, little though they knew it at the time, did more by their action to stop the Slave Trade



Entrance to Cocoa Roça, Island of Principe.

between Angola and the Islands, than years of agitation could have accomplished.

The Cocoa Islands.

San Thomé and Principe are two mountainous islands, distant from each other some ninety miles, and situated in the Gulf of Guinea, and their combined areas are but little over 350 square miles. The soil is excellent, and both are well watered by numerous mountain streams, which render irrigation comparatively easy. The intense heat of an equatorial sun harnessed to this scientific distribution of water provides the islands with the essential atmosphere for the production of cocoa. Their economic prosperity may be gathered from the fact that cocoa, valued at £250,000, was last

November carried to Europe in the holds of the s.s. *Angola* in a single journey. The total output for the year 1911 is stated to be nearly ten thousand million *reis*, or approximately £2,000,000 sterling. The administration is under a Governor directly responsible to the Lisbon Government, and local affairs are in the hands of a Municipal Council, to whom considerable credit is due for the laying out of attractive public gardens, reservoirs, water supply, and several miles of roads comparable to any in West Africa. The town of San Thomé is unique, also, in that it possesses public baths and wash-houses, refreshingly cool and kept spotlessly clean, although unhappily by slaves from the Angola hinterland. Every institution, however, is in the grip of the planting community, whose power "to set up and pull down" may be estimated from the fact that within the last ten years the planters have tolerated no less than twenty-five governors. The cocoa plantations, well organised and second to none in West Africa, possess building, harness-making, and wheelwright's establishments; while some of the better ones provide schools for the children and hospitals for the sick. Some, like the plantation whose title is "The City of Sorrows," bordering on the road known by the name of "The Mother of God," are fenced in with barbed wire: others, akin to the "River of Gold" plantation, have their headquarters and labourers' compounds surrounded by unscalable walls, and are approached through forbidding doorways guarded day and night by the *gentle* sentry. Though San Thomé and Principe possess ideal natural conditions for the production of cocoa, though Providence has given soil and climate, copious rainfall and crystal fountains, and Science has added organisation and modern machinery, both islands are without the most essential of all factors, a virile and indigenous labour supply.

Labour.

With the abolition of slavery in the British Crown Colonies, planters on the Islands of the East and West Indies found themselves practically without labour, and recourse was had to contracted-immigrant coolie labour from India. The abuses, however, which gathered round the system of contracting the coolies and their treatment on the Islands led the Marquis of Salisbury to undertake far-reaching reforms. These had one main constructive object in view—the supply not merely of labour, but of population. Lord Salisbury, then Secretary of State for India, made the employment of immigrant coolies conditional upon a small holding system, whereby those who had terminated their contracts should have the alternative of returning to India or of occupation of free grants of land, when they were to be treated

"as no whit inferior to those of any other class of Her Majesty's "subjects." This policy, noble in conception, to-day markedly successful in most of its practical results, has never been attempted by the Portuguese; they have been content to satisfy immediate requirements, regardless of the future welfare of the islands, which, in consequence, are to-day, after an occupation of centuries, minus a population other than imported labour, and that largely under conditions of slavery.

Free Labour.

As the truth gradually forced its way before public notice, an inevitable protest resulted, and steps were taken to obtain labourers from other parts of the African continent. Cabenda boys were tried, but they proved unsuited to agricultural labour, and they

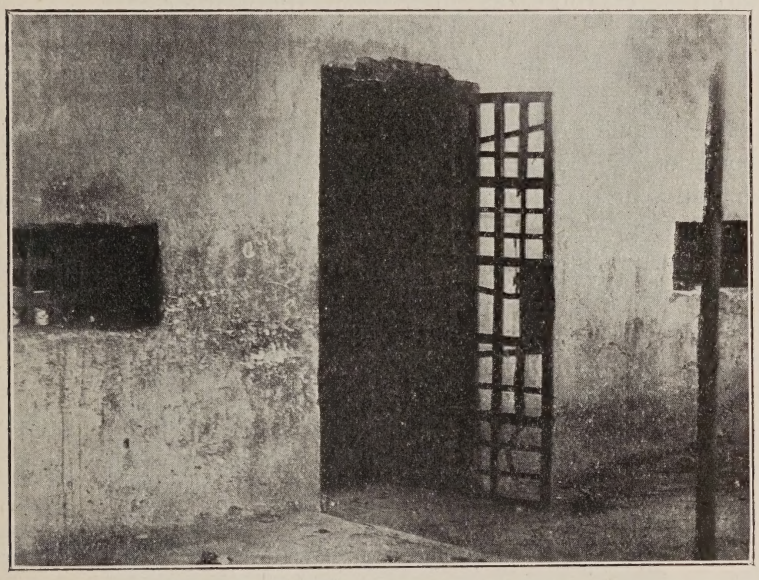
Angola Slaves on San Thomé.

are now employed as boat boys and transport workers. Cape Verdeans form a large proportion of the labourers on Principe, but they have uncertain tempers, and are armed with knives, which they do not hesitate to use if they think any attempts are being made to defraud them of their rights. Mozambique labour was tried in 1908, and this experiment is proving, for the time, so successful, that many planters look to East rather than West Africa for their future supply. All available evidence appears to prove that Cabenda, Cape Verde, and Mozambique labour is, so far as contract labour goes, fairly recruited and honestly treated as "free "labour." With the exception of ninety Quelenge boys, recently

imported, the official shipment of labourers from Angola has, for a time, ceased.

Slave Labour.

The San Thomé-Angola question has for years presented a two-fold aspect. The sale and shipment of slaves from the mainland and the plantation slavery on the island. The shipment of slaves having nominally ceased, the main problem to-day is that of the slaves on the islands, as distinct from actual *serviçaes* (contract labourers). The number of slaves on the plantations can, however, only be roughly estimated, owing to the lack of reliable statistics, and also to "smuggling" on the one hand, and a very variable death rate on the other. Again, we do not



Section of slave quarters in rear of old slave trader's house, Catumbella, Angola.

know how many were on the islands prior to 1887, the date of the earliest published records. No doubt almost all of these, with the exception of the very young, have died ere this, for only an exceptionally strong man or woman could survive twenty-five years of plantation labour. At the same time, all the surviving children born to these earlier *serviçaes* are to-day in slavery. We may fix these at a conservative estimate of 15,000 for the year 1887, and to bring the figures to date the following must be added:—

From	1887-1897	numbers imported ...	24,059
,,	1898-1908	,, ,, ...	39,884
			63,943

Slave Values.

Mr. Joseph Burtt, in this report, gives £25 to £40 as the normal price per head delivered on the islands. Mr. Consul Nightingale gave £50 as the value. A fair average would seem to be that of £40. We arrive thus at a known total shipment to the islands of over 63,000 slaves within the last twenty-five years. A human cargo worth something over two and a half millions sterling. It may be objected that at the Cadbury-*Standard* trial, the price quoted worked out at about £18 each, but it must not be forgotten that the batch of two hundred then offered for sale would include several young and inexperienced labourers besides older persons, who would probably have but a short working-life of a few years or months remaining as an asset to the planter.

Vital Statistics.

It is extremely difficult to obtain vital statistics either from the Government officials or the planters on the Islands. Either they have none, or they are ashamed to publish them; all one could get from the Curador was the general statement that "birth and "death rates work out at a proportion of about 600 to 1,000." Taking this statement in conjunction with estimates from Portuguese and English sources, 100 per 1,000 may be regarded as the average death rate.

Estimated number of slaves on the islands in 1887 ...	15,000
Ditto, including smuggling between the years 1887-1908	65,000
	80,000
Estimated excess of deaths over births during 22 years	25,000
	55,000

If it is claimed, as some in fact do claim, that fewer than these are on the islands because the death rate is higher and the birth rate lower, so much the worse for the planters, so much greater the evil. From this total, however, the services from Mozambique and Cape Verde must be deducted. Their number is not large, probably less than 5,000, but, allowing for latitude by deducting 10,000, there would still be remaining 45,000. The Curador in San Thomé was unable last month to do more than express the opinion that "about 40,000 is a fair estimate."

We have, therefore, three estimates:—

1908	William A. Cadbury	37,831
1912	Estimate of Curador on San Thomé ...	40,000
1912	Foregoing estimate based upon available data	45,000

Cocoa Production.

Both San Thomé and Principe passed from the early stage of agricultural development over twenty years ago; consequently the ordinary labour of the slaves cannot be regarded as arduous. It is the monotonous continuity of it which renders it repugnant to the roaming disposition of the liberty-loving African. The food supplies, too, appear to be ample, and in the main the housing of the labourers is good. On two or three *roças* model dwellings are shown to the traveller, and on one at least the bricks used in construction were brought at considerable cost from Europe.

Slaves working on light railway; Island of Principe. Foremost figure that of lad born in slavery.

The Planter's Case.

It must not be supposed that all the S. Thomé planters on the Island believe in, or defend, present conditions, any more than it must be supposed that, without exception, they are habitually guilty of inhuman maltreatment of the slaves. The charge of maintaining slavery most of them emphatically deny, and in support of their contention point to legal contracts which cover the original

transaction by which the labour was obtained. They also remind the investigator that the labourers are paid. There are, however, some honest planters who admit that the original "contract" was not altogether genuine, and the statements made by the planters and the slaves respectively with regard to the wages paid differ so absurdly that one is compelled to dismiss both. To many managers definite acts of cruelty would be highly repulsive. It is furthermore very obvious that not a few owners and planters do everything which science and money can provide to make the lot of the slave a happy one. The planter argues with much warmth and sincerity of conviction that the labourers are better housed, fed, and clothed on the plantations than they would be in their mainland villages. Their melancholy demeanour and their insistent desire for liberty, the low birth-rate and frightful mortality amongst the slaves is put down very largely to the gross obstinacy and stupidity of the enslaved negroes.

The Slave's Case.

Very little has yet been written or published upon the opinions of the slaves themselves. A combination of circumstances has hitherto prevented travellers from obtaining direct and uninfluenced testimony. It is now possible to give statements direct from the slaves. Mr. Cadbury, in his book, says:

> "Anyone with experience of the timidity of the Angola native will know that the only way to get at the inner feelings of such a man, is to take him aside and patiently question him upon the subject."

If to this is added cross-questioning him upon doubtful points, recording only those that are given with clear evidence of sincerity and truthfulness, then the statements below may be regarded as reliable evidence.

Statements transcribed from Diary:—

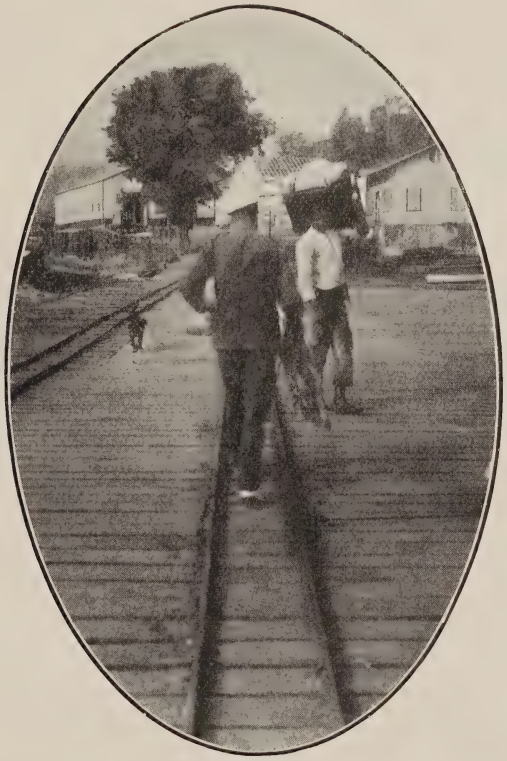
> "Had talk with old man who had been enslaved on the island of S. Thomé for thirty years—he came originally from the Upper Kasai—said he wanted to go home, but that his master had not yet freed him. The whole group of slaves by whom the old man was surrounded stated that they wished to go home, but white master had not yet 'called'* them. Before the advent of the Republican Government they were given no wages. Now they are given: women, 4 crowns; men, 5 crowns per month (equal to about 8s. and 10s. respectively). They say they are frequently flogged and beaten with a long, stout cane. They all appear extremely sullen and servile."

* "Called" is the term used by most of the slaves, and most of them evidently believed that only when the owner calls them forward and liberates them are they free to go home.

"Discussed situation with four *serviçaes* (slaves), who said they were often whipped, but, apart from that, well treated. Three had served fifteen, fifteen, and twenty-five years respectively, and the other did not know how long. They all expressed a desire to go home to their friends. They had been caught near their villages by native slave-traders, and sold to the white man on the coast."

"Boa Entrada *serviçal* (slave) caught in 'Chipe' and sold in Catumbella six years ago; white man shipped him here (San-Thomé), he was well treated and not whipped; would like to go home . . . . but cannot go until white man says he may."

"Talk with *serviçaes* carrying corpse of comrade. They said they had been brought from a district 'one month from Benguella.' One had been in slavery seven years, the other only three months. The latter insisted on this, and that he was caught in the road and sold at Benguella. His colleague confirmed the statement. Both of them emphatic as to their desire to go home."



Man carrying heavy bundle of chicottes for use on Principe Island.

Liberation and Repatriation.

The exposures which have taken place during the last few years, the consequent censure of public opinion and the advent of the Republican Government, have convinced a section of the

Portuguese nation that some effective steps must be taken to purge the Administration of the odium which attaches to a maintenance of slavery. Whilst a recognised traffic in slaves from the mainland has practically ceased, the progress of liberation and repatriation which began in 1908 is barely perceptible. It has been stated in the Press that large numbers have been repatriated to their native country, one British journal being informed, and publishing the information, that 30,000 had been allowed to return home within recent months. The publication of official figures, however, will show that only 385 were liberated during the year 1911. True, the total repatriation figures are 1,089, but of these 702 represent Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Cabinda boys, all of whom are genuine *serviçaes*. It may be argued that only 385 had completed five years' service, but we know that in the two years 1905-6 alone, nearly 7,000 were shipped to the islands, and therefore, under a *bonâ-fide* contract system, were due to return to their homes at the latest in 1911. Where, then, are the remaining 6,000? Can it be that these able-bodied men and women—most of them, be it remembered, in the prime of life—have all perished? If so, the demand for an early liberation of the whole 30,000 or 40,000 slaves should become a thousandfold more clamant.

A Missing £100,000.

In December, 1907, Mr. Cadbury, accompanied by Mr. Joseph Burtt, attended a conference of San Thomé proprietors in Lisbon, and at a later date a considered and formal statement was issued to the Press, in which the proprietors stated that the repatriation fund then amounted to about £100,000, and that this would be immediately transferred to the Bank in San Thomé, and "each "repatriated labourer will receive £18 on landing in Angola." This fund was not derived from philanthropic sources, but actually represented a regular deduction of 50 per cent. from the "wages" of the slaves for a period of four years. Since May, 1911, two-thirds of the wages have, it is said, been taken from the slaves and *serviçaes*, and credited to the Repatriation Fund.

In December, 1907, the proprietors admitted that they held no less than £100,000 due to the *serviçaes*, but how comes it that nine months later there was only about £60,000 in the Bank? Where is the missing £40,000? Nor is this the only financial question which calls for explanation. The annual accretion to the fund should, on the 1903-1907 basis, be about £25,000 a year, and thus even a capital fund of £60,000 in 1907 should become £160,000 at the close of 1911, but in March, 1912, the Curador of San Thomé informed the writer that it was only "about 500 contos" (£100,000). Upon this basis another £60,000 is missing, or a total of £100,000.

A legitimate criticism of these figures is that the repatriated slaves for the years 1908-11, which, however, cannot number more than 600, received the £18 per head, according to the statement of the San Thomé proprietors; which would account for £10,800. Admittedly, if correct, but the average amount received by the repatriated slaves is not £18, but £3; thus, the total legitimate deductions from the fund could only be about £1,800.

On February 20th last, thirty-seven liberated slaves were put ashore at Benguella, and of these only four received any money at all. The remaining thirty-three, though they had spent the greater part of their lives in slavery, were absolutely destitute, and their plight was so distressing that the London Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society formally offered the Governor, through its representative, to place a sum of money at his disposal to relieve their distressing condition.

The inevitable limitations of space permit of only two or three statements of the liberated slaves:—

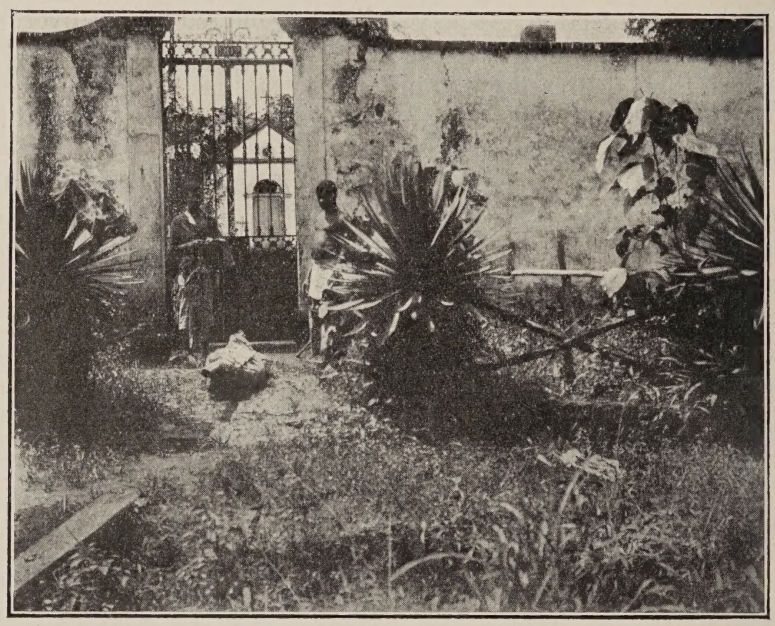
J——, a man of about thirty years of age, was born in the hinterland of Novo Redondo. He had served sixteen years on the *Roça* A——, in San Thome. Availing himself of repatriation, he was sent away *without* his wife and two daughters. The wife had been compelled to take a fresh contract previous to the expiration of the husband's term. He had never received money until the change of Government, when he was given "five "crowns per month." He says punishments are "too much "flogging and palmatoria."

A——, a man of about thirty years, was sent to San Thomé as a small child slave, and had practically spent his life on the A—— *roça*. He was compelled to leave his wife and son on San Thomé because mother "re-contracted." They tried to keep him there, but he insisted on returning to the mainland, and because he refused he was badly treated every day by the ganger and given the heaviest work, such as carrying rock—previous to the expiration of his contract. This man said that if they would stop the floggings plenty of people would go to San Thomé. Like the others, he received no pay until the change of Government, when he received "five "crowns." Things generally are better on the Island since Republican Government, with the exception of floggings.

T——, a man of about twenty-five years, had served on *Roça* M—— for eleven years. He is a native of Samba, inland from Benguella, was caught in his own village by native slavers and sold to other slave-traders of Bailundu, who in turn sold him to a white slave-trader in Catumbella, who shipped him to San Thomé. He complained of flogging, and that only recently had he received any pay: "five crowns" per month.

He was compelled to leave wife and son, the former being forced to re-contract.

The foregoing statements are a fair selection from a large number which have a common cry, "Give us our liberty to "return home." The planters know how passionately the slaves desire liberty, but they cheat themselves into believing that it is merely the desire of a childish people, ignorant of what is good for them. The Portuguese officials not only know, but recognise it. The Curador (Protector) in Benguella urged the thirty-seven slaves recently liberated to take contracts in that district in order to avoid starvation, but, as he said, the one cry of the slave on



Corpse of serviçal at gate of cemetery, with two slave carriers.

landing again on African soil is "Let me go home." Several of those most recently liberated had been driven over ten years ago from the Upper Kasai and Lake Tanganyika, but within five days of landing they started off without a single five *reis* piece in their possession, regardless of the risks entailed in crossing the continent in search of the primitive village home of years gone by.

Upon what possible pleas can emancipation be denied to the slaves on San Thomé and Principe? Not on ethical grounds assuredly; demonstrably not on economic grounds. The majority of the planters agree that the respective working-values of the Angola slave and free Mozambique labourers is in the proportion of not less than two to three, with a relative cost of 42s. and 50s.

per month. Taking plantations of equal size, but differing as regards labour conditions—slave or free—the following provides an interesting parallel:—

600 Slave labourers @ 42s. per month	£15,120
400 Free ,, 50s. ,, ...	12,000
Annual saving on employment of free labour ...	£3,120

If it be ethically right and economically advantageous to liberate the slaves and employ free labour, how comes it that the planters still maintain such a firm grip of their slaves? For this there are several reasons, primarily the unstable political conditions in Portugal inspire the Royalist planters of the islands with a hope that a Government less critical of Colonial abuses may soon return to power in Lisbon. A less vigilant Government would undoubtedly leave the door open to a cheapening of the cost of labour. Next in importance is the undoubted fact that a large and continuous recruitment of Mozambique labour is bound, sooner or later, to come into competition with the Transvaal recruiting agencies; left to fight that contest unaided by administrative intervention, gold will easily outbid cocoa.

In this article every effort has been made to present a statement at once calm and judicial; every allowance has been made for Portuguese susceptibilities, but others also have a claim to the tender regards and sympathies of civilisation. Forty thousand slaves on the cocoa islands appeal for liberty; they mutely appeal only because they have no means of expressing their passion for freedom, "home," and country. Their isolation deepens the pathos of their helplessness, and renders their claim upon the European nations so imperative that it cannot be ignored.

A few weeks ago the writer was standing on a cocoa *roça* in the presence of four young slaves. Two had known freedom in the home-land; the other two had been born in slavery, and one of the latter had but recently been "transferred" with the cattle and other "stock" from a distant plantation. They all wore a melancholy expression, and for a long time jerked out their sentences automatically: gradually, however, a perceptible mental change took place as the slaves began to realise that someone who really cared for their welfare was speaking to them.

"Would we like to go home?"

"White man, what a question to put to us! We have no hope "of ever seeing our native village again."

"But I promise to do my best to set you free."

"White man, in a short time you will disappear over yonder "great water and will forget the thousands of slaves on these "islands."

Words cannot portray the pathetic tone in which the last sentence broke forth from the spokesman of the slaves; they struck so deeply and moved so profoundly that the following promise was given with a particular gesture, denoting to the African mind unfailing sincerity, and always inspiring absolute faith:—

"Listen!—then pass the word round to the other slaves. There "are liberty-loving people in Europe who will struggle to obtain "your freedom, and in their name I promise you that within two "years you shall be free."

"Rash!" the comfortable critic may exclaim. But if so, let him remember that if those particular slaves are not rescued within two years they will pass beyond human aid.

In any case, that promise was so joyously received, and has since inspired such hope that the slaves now have something to live for—their freedom!

If civilisation fails the slaves on the cocoa islands, they will perish within the next ten years. Within the next *five years* 20,000 *will have succumbed.* Portugal must be asked to liberate and then repatriate the slaves—Great Britain can help her so to do. If, however, Portugal refuses friendly advice and disinterested offers of assistance, justice demands that her African colonies be abandoned to an impending fate.

To free the slaves on the islands of San Thomé and Principe, and on the mainland of Angola.

To maintain a vigilant watch upon the rubber syndicates of the Amazon Valley.

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